

LESSON 2E—NARRATIVE: WHO IS AN ARCHAEOLOGIST WHO STUDIES ANCIENT PEOPLE IN MONTANA?

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Karma Cochran is an archaeologist who studies Montana's ancient people. As an enrolled member of the Gros Ventre Tribe, Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, Montana, Karma found becoming an archaeologist a choice she made easily. Her study of Native American people of the past allows her to preserve aspects of Indian culture lost through events in American settlement. She learns about tribal histories, then documents them for present and future generations. Karma says, "Native American people have been here a long time. Our history and culture is rich in tradition." Karma is proud of her heritage and shares it with others through her archaeological work.

Karma has been fascinated with archaeology for as long as she can remember, and she credits her mother for her interest. Her mother held a job with the Indian Health Service, providing health care to Native American people. The job required moving to various locations, and, her mother loved to travel. Karma recalls visiting museums and parks dedicated to archaeology and dinosaurs. As the youngest of ten children, she remembers her mom taking her everywhere! She saw some amazing places when living in Arizona near Canyon de Chelly National Park, an area very rich in cultural and archaeological sites.

Karma attended elementary and secondary schools in Montana, Arizona, and Wyoming. In 1997, she

received her Bachelor's degree in Anthropology, and a minor in Native American Studies, from the University of Montana, Missoula. While in college she maintained good grades to participate in a cooperative education program with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). During summer and winter breaks from school, Karma received on-the-job work experience as a student trainee archaeologist. In return, the BIA helped pay her tuition and other college expenses. Upon graduation, she was hired full-time by the BIA. Karma is now working toward her Master's degree in Anthropology, and hopes to achieve a doctorate.

Karma's archaeological work with the Bureau of Indian Affairs covers Indian reservations in Montana and Wyoming. She has worked on all reservations in these two states. The artifacts and features she finds provide evidence of prehistoric and historic occupation, such as old houses dating back to the first homesteading. Karma has yet to work outside of the United States. She hopes to travel to South America and research the rich history of ancient people on that continent.

Karma finds all aspects of Montana's past and people intriguing. She prefers to study prehistoric archaeology because her people have inhabited this continent for thousands of years. She enjoys using historic archaeology to study cultural changes brought to Native Americans by contact with settlers, and she likes to

research early pioneer life.

Karma's favorite Montana site is Snake Butte, located on Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Snake Butte provides an excellent representation and concentrated sample of Plains rock art. The images there range from handprints to a variety of animal forms. It is a good site for analyzing and comparison with other Montana rock art. Snake Butte also gives insight into elements important to early Native Americans, as well as their lifestyles and history. Other archaeological sites near Snake Butte offer more information that helps archaeologists interpret the area's use over time.

The most interesting sites Karma has found include those with both large rock alignments and tipi rings on Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. The rock alignments, or buffalo runs, are longer than any alignment she has seen. The tipi ring site includes over fifty rings and is, by far, the largest campsite she has surveyed. These sites provide insight into the area's inhabitation before reservations were established. They are located on Fort Belknap and confirm that early Native Americans used these places for hunting and camping purposes.

Karma states that one of her most exciting finds was not even archaeological. It was paleontological. She attended a class at Egg Mountain, near Choteau, Montana, where all kinds of dinosaur fossils are found. During a field trip, Karma noticed a bone sticking out of the ground. With help from the staff, she excavated the bone. She had found an adolescent duck-billed dinosaur leg bone or arm bone.

She thought it was pretty cool! But, what Karma would most like to find at a Montana site is archaeological: a mammoth bone with a Paleoindian Clovis point stuck in it. This would prove that humans occupied Montana and hunted these animals 12,000 to 14,000 years ago.

Karma's favorite method of analysis is to map sites using Global Positioning System (GPS) satellites. She likes the accuracy of pinpointing a site and using a computer to record information on the spot. GPS mapping offers an excellent look at the distribution of sites and features, and their patterns. Karma also likes experimenting with digital photography to record and analyze rock art sites. Storing the images in a computer provides a permanent record. This is important because rock art is fragile; erosion and vandalism can destroy these irreplaceable resources.

Karma is not sure if any of her job is easy, but she has the most fun doing archaeological surveys. She enjoys hiking in the mountains, looking at beautiful scenery, and working on her own. She also says it is great to work on the reservation she is from, and with Indian people on other reservations.

The most difficult part of Karma's duties is surveying when it is hot and she is tired from working all day. She would like to sit in the shade and relax, but the projects have to be completed! Sometimes report writing can be dull. She also finds that knowing and learning the many laws that apply to archaeology, and implementing them, is demanding. At times, it is difficult for Karma being a Native American and being an archaeologist. It is hard to

balance what she knows is right, and how she feels as an Indian, with the established government system and policies. Those policies dealing with land ownership and resource management are especially tough.

When asked what she believes the future holds for archaeology, Karma says: "I hope to see more integration of tribes in the field of archaeology, bridging the gap between the two. Montana archaeologists deal with many aspects of Indian peoples' ways. I think it is imperative that we be involved; after all, it is our history and culture. As we become more involved, some stereotypes Native Americans have concerning archaeology are changing. New, positive ideas about archaeology are appearing. It is good to see."

Karma suggests studying the sciences of geology and biology, as well as English and writing if you are interested in archaeology. Archaeology requires a lot of report writing, and being understandable is very important. Knowledge of math is also helpful. Archaeologists must know the history and geography of a region before they can understand its people and their societies.

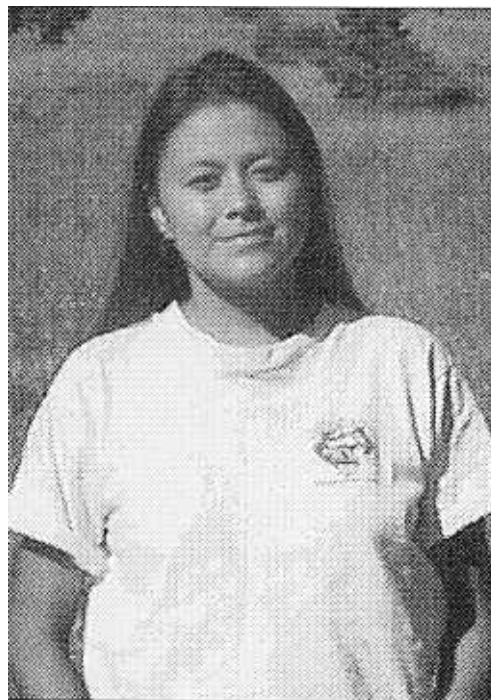
Her message to you is: "We are all rich in history and culture; it makes us who we are. Archaeology and the study of human culture in Montana gives us a greater understanding and appreciation of our early ancestors. It teaches us about their ability to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds, and about their perseverance. Because of our ancestors, we are here and have developed into who we are. Be proud of your own, and others', history. It is

all special and in some way sacred. Preserve and protect all cultures.

"Sure, archaeology is a science, and scientific information is wonderful. But archaeology is the study of real humans and cultures that existed in the past. It is about people. Be respectful in dealing with cultural resources and learn what you can. As I was told, this connection between heart and mind is vital, not just in your work, but to you as a person."

In her free time, Karma enjoys camping, reading, and especially fishing. Her catch of the season was a ten-pound, twenty-two-inch walleye, at Cooney Dam. Students interested in archaeology may contact Karma at:

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